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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Fourteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 260th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 16 January 1995, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. CORTI

CONTENTS

OPENING OF THE SESSION

SOLEMN DECLARATION BY THE NEW MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The CHAIRPERSON declared open the fourteenth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and welcomed the new and re-elected members of the Committee.

2. Mrs. MONGELLA (Assistant Secretary-General, Division for the Advancement of Women, and Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women), said that the elimination of discrimination against women was clearly linked to the advancement and equality of women within society. The Committee's work had contributed to the evaluation of progress in that area and to recommendations for future action. It was clear that there was a need to strengthen the servicing of the Committee in order to allow it to carry out its mandate effectively.

3. She complimented the Committee on its success in developing a favourable atmosphere for ensuring compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. She welcomed new and re-elected members and thanked those members who had completed their service to the Committee in 1994. She also welcomed the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, appointed by the Commission on Human Rights at its fiftieth session. As part of her mandate, the Special Rapporteur was expected to work closely with the Committee.

4. The Committee had decided to present a progress report on its work to the Fourth World Conference on Women. Accordingly, the Secretariat had prepared a preliminary draft of that report (CEDAW/C/1995/7), following the instructions given to it by the Committee at its thirteenth session. The draft sought to place the Convention in the context of 50 years of United Nations efforts to promote equality between men and women. It reviewed the history of the Committee, drew conclusions from the Committee's substantive work on the meaning of the Convention, and suggested new directions for the Committee's future work. Those new directions should be the Committee's contribution to the implementation of the Platform for Action of the World Conference. The revised draft Platform to be considered by the Commission on the Status of Women in March 1995 set out action in the area of women's human rights that would also shape the Committee's work. It was expected that the draft Platform for Action would be issued on 1 February; while it would not be before the Committee for discussion, some elements of the draft were of relevance to the Committee's input to the Conference.

5. A central concern of the World Conference on Human Rights had been that women's human rights should be fully integrated into United Nations human rights mechanisms. There was a consensus that there were two prerequisites for integrating women's rights successfully. First of all, "mainstream" bodies should recognize the importance of incorporating women's concerns into their work. The other human rights bodies had a responsibility to make that happen, as had in fact been recommended by the chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies at their fifth meeting. Secondly, there must be strong institutions

concerned specifically with women, and the Committee must be one such institution. Indeed, the member States which had participated in informal consultations on the Platform for Action in December 1994 had agreed that there was a need to strengthen existing institutions to enable them to implement the Platform for Action. That would also involve developing the relations among the various institutions concerned specifically with women, particularly the relationship between CEDAW and the Commission on the Status of Women.

6. The Committee had a decisive role to play in the overall human rights regime, and many of the issues to be discussed at the current session would have an impact on that role. The Committee's workload would increase substantially as more States became parties to the Convention, especially since the Platform for Action would undoubtedly emphasize universal ratification, without reservations, by the year 2000, yet the Committee's work had been hampered by the time constraints imposed by the Convention itself. Fortunately, steps were under way to remove those constraints. At the Committee's recommendation, the Economic and Social Council had requested that an analysis of the Committee's working methods, by comparison with those of other treaty bodies, be submitted to the General Assembly for its consideration at its forty-ninth session. On the basis of that analysis, the Assembly had decided to request the States parties to the Convention to meet in 1995 to consider revising the Convention to remove the restriction on meeting time. Accordingly, a special meeting of the States parties was to take place on 22 May 1995 and the General Assembly was to consider the meeting's recommendations at its fiftieth session.

7. Discussions had been held between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Centre for Human Rights on developing a joint programme of activities for the integration of women's human rights into the work of the wider human rights regime, and the Commission on the Status of Women was to consider a report by the Division on the outcome of those discussions. In that connection, the new focal point for women of the Centre for Human Rights had visited the Division, and staff of the Division had participated in the meetings of other treaty bodies. A member of the Division had participated in a training seminar on human rights reporting organized for the Centre for Human Rights in November 1994, at which she had provided information not only on the Convention but also on the incorporation of gender concerns into other human rights instruments.

8. Another issue of concern was the large number of reservations to the Convention. The Fourth World Conference on Women would undoubtedly recommend that States parties should consider withdrawing their substantive reservations. A comparative analysis of reservations to the Convention and to other human rights instruments was contained in document CEDAW/C/1995/6. The United Kingdom had recently withdrawn some of its reservations to certain articles of the Convention and she hoped that other Governments would follow its example. She drew attention to the fact that at its forty-sixth session, the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities had requested the Secretary-General to seek the Committee's views on the desirability of obtaining an advisory opinion on, inter alia, the value and legal effect of reservations to the Convention. Members would recall that at its twelfth session, the Committee had recommended the drafting of an optional protocol to the Convention establishing a communications procedure. At its thirteenth session, the

Committee had recommended that the Commission on the Status of Women should organize an expert group meeting on the subject, with the participation of CEDAW members. As yet, no such meeting had taken place, but a meeting had been organized by a non-governmental organization, in which a number of Committee members had participated. The text proposed by that meeting had been circulated to members of the Committee for possible consideration at the current session.

9. The Committee had decided to revise its rules of procedure and the guidelines for the preparation of national reports. The Division for the Advancement of Women had prepared a draft text, which was contained in document CEDAW/C/1995/6. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly had raised a number of issues regarding conference services. General Assembly resolution 49/221 had, inter alia, appealed to the human rights treaty bodies to review their need for summary records. Four other human rights treaty bodies had eliminated summaries of the examination of States parties' reports from their annual reports, while maintaining summary records, in order to reduce the length of their reports. The Committee might consider such an approach in reviewing its own need for documentation.

10. With regard to the Committee's consideration of reports by States parties at the current session, she drew attention to General Assembly resolution 49/162, which requested the Committee to pay particular attention to discrimination on grounds of age when evaluating national reports on the implementation of the Convention. She also referred to resolution 1994/5 of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, which recommended that the Committee should give particular attention to the implementation of article 6 of the Convention and should include in its reporting guidelines an item on contemporary forms of slavery. The Committee's general recommendations on articles 9, 15 and 16 had made a welcome contribution to the understanding of women's rights with regard to marriage and the family. Articles 7 and 8 should be given similar importance. The Committee's recommendations provided guidance to States parties that would be very helpful in implementing the Platform for Action.

SOLEMN DECLARATION BY THE NEW MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

11. The new members of the Committee, namely Ms. Bare, Ms. Bernard, Ms. Javate de Dios, Ms. Estrada Castillo, Ms. Hartono, Ms. Sato and Ms. Shalev, made the solemn declaration provided for in rule 10 of the Committee's rules of procedure.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

12. The CHAIRPERSON invited nominations for election to the offices of Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Rapporteur for a term of two years, in accordance with article 15, paragraph 2, of the Convention and rules 13 and 14 of the Committee's rules of procedure.

13. Ms. GARCIA-PRINCE nominated Ms. Corti for re-election to the office of Chairperson.

14. Ms. Corti was re-elected Chairperson by acclamation.

15. Ms. SINEGIORGIS nominated Ms. Acuij, Ms. ESTRADA CASTILLO nominated Ms. Garcia-Prince and Ms. JAVATE DE DIOS nominated Ms. Lin Shanshen for the three offices of Vice-Chairperson.

16. Ms. Acuij, Ms. Garcia-Prince and Ms. Lin Shanshen were elected Vice-Chairpersons by acclamation.

17. Ms. BUSTELO GARCIA DEL REAL nominated Ms. Schopp-Schilling for the office of Rapporteur.

18. Ms. SINEGIORGIS, supported by Ms. TALLAWY, endorsed the nomination of Ms. Schopp-Schilling but suggested that, in future, prior consultations should be held concerning nominations to the Bureau, so as to ensure equitable representation of the various regions.

19. Ms. Schopp-Schilling was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.